

**From:** Sherry Blair [mailto:sherryjblair@gmail.com]  
**Sent:** Thursday, May 26, 2011 12:46 PM  
**To:** Richard Patenaude  
**Cc:** Sara Lamnin  
**Subject:** May 26, 2011 Planning Commission Public Hearing agenda item #1

Dear Commissioners;

I have been living in the Burbank neighborhood for thirty seven years and plan to remain here for the rest of my life. It is my neighborhood. I love it and belong here. My sons and grandson live here too. My view of our neighborhood is a longitudinal view that may shed light on your deliberations about the Burbank "residual" site tonight. I apologize for its length, but that is the only way to tell the story.

When my children were in school in the 70's and 80's, I worked at the old Burbank School, first as a volunteer parent, then serving on councils and committees required by the state and federal "war on poverty" programs that were intended to uplift the children in much the same way as the current Promise Neighborhood program.

In order to qualify for State and Federal funds, HUSD needed to describe our neighborhood in the most negative terms. Having those descriptions drummed into us by authority figures without the balancing of positive descriptions that could just as easily have been said had a terrible effect on our collective self esteem. The programs too were flawed and, although they brought in money, energy and improvements, they failed to meet the needs of my neighborhood. Worse yet, they divided our neighbors one from the other and caused conflicts among our children. Finally, they reinforced the false idea that government was going to save us which fostered dependency. Even so, I clearly see that it was the best we knew how to do at that time.

At one point, Mayor Weinreb formed a Neighborhood Center committee in an effort to address some of our needs. As a Burbank resident, I was asked to serve and gladly did so. A neighborhood center would give us the space necessary to come together. Unfortunately, I discovered, the real intention was not actually to form a neighborhood center but, rather, a Hispanic center. It was the city's way of partnering with the active Hispanic groups of that time. Furthermore, the center was moved farther and farther away from the center of our neighborhood and finally ended up as what is now the La Familia Fuller Avenue center. It was designed to serve primarily Hispanic families, once more dividing us.

Later on, the city used negative descriptions of our neighborhood to qualify for the funds that improved downtown "B" Street.

My neighborhood was given notice during the planning of the Cannery design. But even the city has acknowledged publicly that the 300 feet limit on notifications is insufficient. Furthermore, without a pre-existing community group, the neighborhood simply does not have the communications and mutual support needed to challenge the planning of the strong partnerships of the city, HARD, HUSD and the developers. We have relied on our representatives, like you, to do the right thing and that has not always worked for us.

I felt called back to the neighborhood and specifically to the Burbank residual site early last year. An idea for that site had come to me and I began to do the homework. I spoke with the city planner and the Mayor. I was told that the agreement with Citation homes had been terminated because the economic downturn had made it impossible for Citation to follow through. The city planned to put out another request for proposal in three or four years when the economy improved. Frankly, I thought God had intervened and that there was an opportunity then for the change we have all been waiting for, with time to organize.

Since then, I have spoken to many of the principle people involved, my neighbors, two planners, the Mayor, Jesus Armas, the developers, people I met at neighborhood partnership meetings in other neighborhoods, the promise neighborhood meetings and the South Hayward Collaborative and board and city council members from all three agencies. I have been trying to discover the truth of the matter and what can be done about it.

What I have found is that those who live outside my neighborhood see our new school and park and conclude that our neighborhood was well served by the Cannery plan. I am sure that was the intention. The results of the developments are impressive too. If I didn't live here, I would think this neighborhood should be grateful. But I do live here and so do many others. We have a different view and we have a stake that I believe is more important than appearances, more important than money.

We dream of what everyone dreams of for our neighborhood, open space, a central place to meet our neighbors, a place to decide what is in our best interests and to cooperate in creating the neighborhood we want and a place for our children to thrive. But HARD, HUSD and the COH cannot imagine what we can visualize for ourselves, the unique contribution of our neighborhood to the city. Even we cannot yet imagine what we want. In order to do that, we have to come together and have meaningful conversations, expressing our individual dreams and finding our common purpose. That is what we need now.

Fortunately, the city has also seen this as our need and wisely began the neighborhood partnership program. I was referred to David Korth and he arranged for our first meeting to be last November. No one was happier than I. In the meantime, I began to organize. With David's help, I contacted some of my neighbors who had been volunteering on city commissions, Neighborhood Alert and the clean and green effort. They seemed interested and I proceed to look for space in which to meet.

I might add here that when the City Council voted against the 2008 Planning Commission's recommendations, they did it with the understanding that the neighborhood could meet at the school. When I tried to reserve space, though, I ran into roadblocks. I spoke to numerous people at both HARD and HUSD. There were policies about community groups using the facilities, but none for individual people who wanted to initiate a community group. Also, there were large fees that I did not want to pay. HUSD was using the facilities most of the time and the HARD sports program was using them the rest of the time. Having found no easy way to proceed, I finally decided to wait until the neighborhood partnership meeting to talk to my neighbors and continue organizing.

That night finally arrived and I was prepared. After the introductions and speeches, an opportunity came to speak and I presented my view, asking my neighbors to meet with me. As soon as I sat down, someone said that a new developer had been found and the city was in the planning stages again. It was all decided. I couldn't believe it! Not one person had told me, no notice had been delivered. I felt like a foolish old woman.

Worse yet, I saw and heard my neighbors accept it without question, without any idea that things could be any different, without any hope of their own. It was a terrible thing to witness for someone with a vision. I went home deflated and depressed.

Soon, though, I began to remember, that even though all that had happened, there was still a chance because the Planning Commission and City Council had to act before the plans would be approved. So I kept talking to people.

The current developers and Jesus Armas, who told me he is helping them, attended our last two neighborhood partnership meetings to inform my neighbors about their project. No one has ever

given my neighbors the idea that it was anything but inevitable. They were asked for their input about the details, but not the decision to develop itself.

I have now appealed for help from many people throughout Hayward. As of yesterday, I told a friend that I did not see that there was anything else I could do that would make a difference, not even going to your meeting tonight.

Then this morning, I remembered Eleanor Roosevelt. She had chaired the committee that was bringing the International Declaration of Human Rights to the floor of the UN. It was the night before the vote and one of the delegates, a Muslim, told her that she couldn't in good conscience vote for the declaration because it didn't name God.

Eleanor knew that she had failed, that there weren't enough votes. She went home deflated and depressed, having given up. It was then, at that time of great need, that her friend stepped in and told her that she had not done enough, that the vote hadn't been taken, that there was still time.

It was evening and Eleanor's spirit, roused by her friend, gave her the idea to talk to a wise Imam. She arranged to meet with him that night and asked him the question. He said that he could tell how wise she was by her knowing how to ask the question and then he told her that God is present, whether or not He is mentioned by name.

With that advice, she was able to convince the Muslim delegate to agree and, as we all know, the Declaration of Human Rights was approved.

I recognise that the one thing I can do now is to tell the story and I offer it here to you. If I were not a minority of one, if I were a whole neighborhood, it would be easy for you to act in our favor. But can you imagine that one person can be inspired to make a difference, whether it is me or you, and that we should help each other? Don't all great ideas begin in the mind of one person?

I appeal to the essential being within each of you. Isn't there a dream you have for your own neighborhood? Will you help me with mine?

Sherry Blair  
22896 Alice Street  
Hayward, CA 94541